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ABSTRACT

Experience Based Career Education (EBCE) is a program which provides students with a comprehensive secondary education that exposes them to a cumulative series of planned, personalized learning experiences in a wide variety of life and work settings. To determine possible program implementation, the Far West Laboratory (FWL) has engaged a series of studies, one of which assessed the opinions of school district teachers and staff concerning adoption feasibility. This approach consisted of an attempt to discover if district variables (demographic or program) influenced receptivity and to identify potential barriers to adoption. (Author/DEP)

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Measuring Attitudes and Perceptions Affecting Local Acceptance of an Innovation: An Exploratory Study

by

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Measuring Attitudes and Perceptions Affecting

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An Exploratory Study

A. Introduction

The Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development is in its third year of development and testing a model of Experience-Based Career Education (EBCE) under the auspice of the National Institute of Education.

Part of a national effort, it is an attempt to open the classroom and allow students to use the entire community as a school. Focusing on direct experience in a wide variety of real-life settings, EBCE provides students with a comprehensive secondary education in such a way that they acquire the understanding they need to choose an adult role and some of the basic skills and knowledge they need to enter and find satisfaction in work. The same learning activities that allow students to explore a broad range of careers--working closely with lawyers, printers, salespersons, arc welders, doctors, carpenters, disc jockeys, union stewards, and reporters--also provide growth in academic skills and result in an accredited high school diploma.

Far West's EBCE program is career-oriented. Because occupational choices play a powerful role in shaping our sense of identify, self-esteem, and life-styles, a focus in career preparation should be an integral part of a person's education. Since "career" is defined broadly "as ones progress through life" and not as a particular job, the EBCE notion of career preparation means providing students with a cumulative series of planned, personalized learning experiences in a wide variety of life/work settings.

EBCE is experience-based. The focus is on direct experience in the community, learning about careers firsthand and applying academic skills to solve real-life problems. It is student centered. The student acts as planner,

decision-maker, and self-evaluator within the general framework of EBCE goals and procedures. Key roles in the FWL-EBCE learning process include the Learning Coordinator who assists the student to plan and carry out learning activities and Resource Persons in the community who volunteer their time to share their knowledge and expertise with student. In order that this learning enterprise proceed as efficiently as possible, FWL has developed learning packages which group together those resources that provide learning activities serving a common set of student outcomes (package goals) related to a subject area and associated careers. Packages are used by students and learning coordinators to plan individual projects which may cut across disciplines and for which completion requires demonstration of a variety of skills. A series of procedural handbooks have been developed to facilitate implementation of the model by school districts. For the past several months, the FWL-EBCE staff have, as part of their contractual objectives, been engaged in a series of studies to (1) assess school district staff's opinions concerning adoption feasibility and perceived problems related to implementation, (2) identify needed modifications of EBCE, (3) learn about potential users' perception of needed training and technical assistance, and (4) help identify important implementation aids useful to school districts.

This paper addresses the first of these purposes i.e., to assess potential adopter's perceptions of FWL-EBCE in terms of its feasibility for adoption The approach, more fully described later in this paper, consisted of an attempt to discover if district variables (e.g., demographic or program) influenced receptivity and "probable adoption" and to assist districts to examine EBCE in terms of potential barriers to adoption.

B. Procedures

1. Selection of Districts. In April of 1974, FWL-EBCE held a one-day

invitational conference with school personnel to present general information about the EBCE model, assess reactions, and determine the extent of further interest. Fifty school districts from a seven state area were invited. Forty-four districts were represented. The majority of the districts indicated strong interest in EBCE. On a questionnaire designed to elicit their perceptions of barriers to adoption of EBCE, it was expected that some differences in perceptions among district types (e.g., size, urbanicity, ethnic mix, wealth) would result. However, no substantial differences vis-à-vis potential barriers to adoption among the districts were found. It was believed that a possible reason for lack of observable differences among district types with regard to the potential barriers was the nature of the information given (primarily orientation) and insufficient time for district personnel to assimilate and generalize this information to their own district needs and characteristics.

FWL-EBCE also planned to conduct studies in which several carefully selected districts would be invited to send representatives to the Far West School for one week. During this time they would have the opportunities to investigate the program in depth, make more considered judgments concerning its attractiveness and feasibility for their own district, and project a "realistic" plan of adoption and implementation. Based on the results of the invitational conference, it was decided that the feasibility studies were of considerable importance as a source of replication/dissemination information.

Invitations were extended to all school districts who had attended the April 1974 invitational conferences. All districts who were interested in participating in the feasibility study were asked to complete a form with answers to such topics as: basis of interest in EBCE, district staff members who would likely be involved in the studies, and demographic data. Twenty-two

districts responded. Eight of these were selected with criteria designed to provide a diversity of district characteristics. Willingness of districts to send people whose role or positions in the district suggested involvement in adoption decision-making and knowledge of district policies, procedures, characteristics, was also a factor in selection. Brief descriptions of the participating districts are given below. These descriptions were summarized from self reports.

District A - a suburban/rural district, 19,000 total students (K-12), 9% Caucasian, middle class and characterized as an innovative district with well developed programs on team teaching, open classrooms, interdisciplinary programs with special emphasis on individualized and active student involvement in content choices. Average expenditure per pupil - $560.

District B - an urban/agricultural/industrial area with 30,000 students (K-12). Ethnically mixed with 50% Caucasians, 25% Mexican-American, 14% Black, 10% Asian; lower middle class-middle; a district with many diverse programs already in place. With regard to adoption of innovations the district was self described as fairly eager and successful. Average expenditure per pupil - $1,200.

District C - an urban district with 27,000 students (K-12), 85% Caucasian, 10% Mexican-American, 2% Black; middle class conservative, with moderately strong support for adoption of innovations. Average expenditure per pupil - $1,00.

District D - an urban district with 55,000 students (K-12), largely middle to lower middle class; 75% Caucasian, 15% Mexican-American, 8% Black; moderately high support for adoption of innovations was claimed; the district was described as mostly traditional, but some individualization, team teaching, variable scheduling, continuous progress can be found. Average expenditure per pupil - $900.

District E - a large urban district with 150,000 students (K-12); total cross section of socio economic status; 50% Caucasian, 39% Black, 11% Mexican-American. District was self described as predominately subject-matter focused, self-contained, teacher-prescribed content and procedures for the most part, but with some student-planning participation in some classes. District was described as highly eager to adopt new programs. Average per pupil expenditure - $1,000.

District F - a medium sized suburban, middle class community with 24,000 students (K-12). Ethnic composition is 89% Caucasian, 9% Mexican-American, 1% Black. Secondary schools are subject-matter oriented, but moving toward individualization, team teaching, and flexible scheduling. Moderately high support for adoption of innovations was claimed. Average expenditure per pupil - $903.

District G - a large suburban district with 21,000 students (K-12), primarily middle class but with extreme ranges in income from very low to very high. Ethnic composition is 92% Caucasian, 6% Mexican-American, 2% Black, Asian, and American Indian. District was described as very traditional, subject-matter oriented, with most instruction described as consisting of teacher-oriented presentations, etc.; a cautious approach to adoption of innovations with

moderate to strong support to those that are adopted. Average per pupil expenditure - $1,375.

District H - a county wide school system with 30,600 students (K-12); high per capital income, 5 1/2% unemployment, but seasonal work creates transiency; major income sources are ranching, services, transportation, and heavy tourism and recreational. Secondary schools were described as subject-matter oriented, departmentalized, teacher prescribed materials and procedures, college preparatory emphasis; approach to adoption of innovations is cautious with moderate support. Average per pupil expenditure - $1,000.

2. Feasibility Study Activities. Team of participating district representatives spent a full week at the Far West Laboratory. Three days were devoted to in depth orientation, explanation of procedures, examination of documents, observation of and discussion with students, school staff, and community resource people. The final two days were devoted to completing a specially prepared workbook concerned with adoption and implementation issues.

The workbook was designed to elicit (a) a description of each participating district in terms of demographic data, existing program data, history of district adoptions, and community relations, (b) reactions to the FWL-EBCE model, (c) a description of the EBCE model that would probably be adopted by each district (e.g., EBCE program components that would be selected, timing, number of students, model configurations that seem appropriate), and (d) an implementation plan that sets forth a sequence of events and tasks that would need to be performed for EBCE to be successfully installed in their district.

District personnel were asked only to assume that their district was going to adopt all or part of the FWL-EBCE model and to project amost likely scenario of adoption and implementation (e.g., what would be adopted, how, who would be

involved, potential problems, etc.) No commitments were required by the laboratory nor by the participating districts.

A major section of the workbook was devoted to collecting reactions to the FWL-EBCE model vis-a-vis perceived adoption barriers. The approach taken was an adaptation of work accomplished at the FWL under another contract. That study is summarized below.

C. Rationale for Approach

As one potentially valuable response to the oft acknowledged gap between knowledge production and use by practitioners, Sikorski & Hutchins (1974) proposed more attention to marketing science. They suggested, following Kotler (1975), an analysis of the structure of the market which includes four steps (1) market definition - determining who is included in a market, (2) market segmentation - identifying district subgroups in the market, (3) market positioning - determining a "target market range," i.e., the part of the market which will be served, and (4) market orchestration - determining an approach for dealing effectively with the different segments included in the target market range.

According to Sikorski & Hutchins, the application of the market segmentation concept, to educational dissemination and utilization assumes that the market for educational innovations is heterogenous subgroups which are expected to respond differently to marketing efforts. The authors suggest that in education, such variables as geographic area, district size, per pupil expenditure, past behavior such as previous record of adoptions, and psychological traits such as attitudes of key personnel, dogmatism among teachers, etc. may be useful.

As a result of their deliberations, a "discrepancy model" was used as a basis for market segmentation and as a guide for market selection and marketing

strategy development. This model developed from two premises: first, change will not occur if there are discrepancies between the potential users and the requirements of a product; second, the educational market can be segmented on the basis of these descriptions.

Discrepancies occur because the nature of the product (the need it addresses, the incentives relevant to its adoption, and its philosophical slant) is incompatible with the nature of the user (his needs, his perception of incentives, his beliefs). Discrepancies also arise between the circumstances for using the product (resources required, adoption convenience) and the resource and tolerances of the user. There are numerous possible kinds of discrepancies: in the area of need, discrepancies may occur because the program addresses a grade level with which the potential adopter is unconcerned; because it is a supplementary program and the potential adopter needs a complete program; because it is designed to be used for several grade levels of one subject while the potential adopter wants a program for several subjects at one grade level; and so forth.

The philosophical slant of the program may be incompatible with that of a potential user. There may be discrepancies between the theoretical base and the approach of a program, and the beliefs and values of the user. In the area of adoption convenience, a program may be rejected because a demonstration unit is not easily accessible for a potential adopter to observe, or the program does not fit into the established curriculum (See Figure 1 for listing of potential discrepancies developed for the Sikorski-Hutchins study.)

The authors explained that for any particular product, some potential discrepancies will be important and some will not. For example, if product uses require no training or reorganization, adontion convenience discrepancies which stem from such requirements will probably never occur. It is conceivable, however, that users may desire reorganization or training as part of the program

FIGURE 1

List of Potential Discrepancies for Adoption/Implementation*

Needs	Incentives	Philosophy	Resources	Adoption Convenience
Discrepancies between the user's needs and the needs addressed by the product.	Discrepancies between the support or justification desired or required by the adopting system and that which is available.	Discrepancies between the general philosophical orientation of the adopting system and the nature of the product.	Discrepancies between the material, human, and temporal requirements of the product and the resources of the user.	Discrepancies between the state of the adopting system and what will be required to easily adopt/implement the product.
Target group addressed.	Early/late knowledge of results (feedback)	Sequential/nonsequential curriculum	Financial cost (includes initial and maintainance, cost of equipment, release time cost, etc.)	Core/elective subject (Is it an established part of the curriculum?)
Complete/supplementary	Priority (how product relates to user)	Structured/unstructured curriculum	Materials required	Purchase accessibility
Horizontal/vertical (for one grade level or for more than one)	High/low probability of outside funding support	Programmed/nonprogrammed	Physical space	High/low demonstrability
Type of effect (outcome, what it does)	Peer opinion (how others feel about the product)	Theoretical basis	Time	High/low adaptability
Subject matter	Bandwagon (influence of other adopters)	Self-sufficiency (teacher-proofness)	Personnel required	High/low divisibility
Product/process (an object or a way of doing things		Developer (acceptability of developer)	Administrative arrangements	Unit of adoption (who must decide)
		Type of evaluation		Reorganization required
				Training required
				Disruptiveness
				Information accessibility

and will therefore find the product incompatible. On the other hand, for those products which do have training or reorganization, these potential discrepancies are very important to consider.

The status of any particular potential adopting unit in regard to each of the 34 potential discrepancies can be characterized as follows:

0 - No discrepancy, either because the identified discrepancy is irrelevant or because the product or circumstances for using the product are perfectly acceptable to the adopting.

1 - A discrepancy exists, but it would probably not prevent adoption.

2 - A discrepancy exists, and it is likely to prevent adoption.

3 - There is a major discrepancy. The product will not be adopted as long as this discrepancy exists.

Thus, each potential adopting unit (for example, each of a number of school districts) would have a series of scores, such as:

District 1 10223300111330003030331313222210000

District 2 23313211123332023312222211220010l0

District 3 3003030303302131213120001000100010

The notion here is that the educational market, or the population of potential adopters for a given product, can be partitioned into segments characterized by particular patterns and magnitudes of discrepancies in relation to that product. Each segment would be characterized by a particular set of 0's, 1's, 2's, and 3's.

D. Instrumentation

For this study, 15 EBCE program characteristics were used as the basis for developing 29 multiple choice items. Each program characteristics (e.g., function or role of the teacher, student's role, content organization, phsyical setting) was described briefly with each description followed by one, two, or three items soliciting a response to the characteristic. For example:

1. Student Function. The student acts as the primary planner/performer. Assistance of the learning coordinator (teacher) is aimed at helping the student become increasingly self-directed.

a. Would staff (in your district) be willing to permit students to assume a much stronger role in the learning process?

_____ yes, most staff would like to give students a stronger voice in decision-making

_____ many staff would be willing

_____ most would not be willing

_____ no one would permit such a thing

b. Since EBCE requires students to be primarily responsible for planning and conducting their educational program, a student's program focus may be narrow and in depth or broad. What would be your school's reaction to this much diversity?

_____ this would definitely not be acceptable

_____ this kind of diversity would create serious problems, but we might be able to handle it

_____ we would prefer some kind of balance, but it would not pose a serious obstacle

_____ this is perfectly acceptable

c. With students actively involved in instructional decision-making and spending considerable time in the community, more patience over outcomes and trust in student motives are often required of staff. Would this be a problem for your staff?

_____ not at all

_____ possibly a minor problem which could be handled

_____ may be a serious problem for staff

_____ this would make the staff very anxious

As indicated above, responses were given a score of 0, 1, 2, or 3, with 0 representing no perceived discrepancy and 3 representing a major discrepancy.

E. Data Analysis

District responses to the items were given the appropriate values (0, 1, 2, or 3) and combined in three separate ways for examination. First, mean scores for each program characteristic (by district) were computed by combining sets of items relating to each characteristic. A total mean score per district across all program characteristics is also given (see Table 1 in Appendix). Second, the items for each district were recombined into sets corresponding to the five discrepancy areas (i.e., need for program, incentives for adoption, philosophical slant, resources required, and adoption convenience). These data are given in Table 2 (see Appendix). Third, the responses were examined in terms of frequency of assigned value percentages for both program characteristics and discrepancy areas in order to obtain an overall profile of the participating districts' major concerns and least concerns. Tables 3 and 4 present these data. (See Appendix.) Finally, Table 5 presents the relationship between high and low scoring districts and their present known commitment to adoption.

F. Results and Discussion

1. Mean scores of program characteristics by district. Generally, the mean of all program characteristics (interpreted as least amount of perceived discrepancies and thus fewest barriers to adoption) were recorded by LEAs self-described as having urban characteristics.* The highest mean scores i.e., strongly perceived discrepancies and thus strong barriers to adoption were obtained from predominately suburban districts. Other self-described characteristics such as history of adoptions, support for innovations by various constituencies, the dominant mode or style of the teaching/learning process in secondary schools are probably important factors, but must be tempered by other factors. For example, a suburban district with strong teacher control of the content and procedures of classroom instruction and poor support for change, may be less than an enthusiastic adopter of EBCE. But in urban districts, even where more traditional modes and methods dominate, perceived acceptance of EBCE is seen as relatively high. It is likely that urban LEAs who are experiencing specific problems (e.g., pressure for alternative programs, high drop-out rate, etc.) are more willing to expend the necessary resources, in spite of possible barriers, in the hope that one or more problems can be resolved.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the mean of all program characteristics computed for each district apparently have some degree of validity in that low scoring districts have seriously pursued adoption of EBCE while those with high means have verified their responses by inaction with regard to EBCE. Follow-up contact by FWL-EBCE staff with all participating districts was the basis of verification. Whether the relationship between low scores on

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*The one exception, a suburban/rural county wide school system actually scored the lowest. However, this system is regionally recognized as innovative and prone to adoption.

items and liklihood of adoption is predictive or simply the result of chance is unknown at this time. Table 5 (see Appendix) shows the relationship between districts with high and low discrepancy scores and their present commitment to adoption.

2. Mean scores of discrepancy areas by district. With only one exception, districts' mean scores arranged themselves in the same order as before; that is, districts who have subsequently proven themselves seriously interested in adoption obtained the lowest scores.

3. Frequency of concerns across districts. Tables 3 and 4 in the Appendix show a rank ordering of items based on zero perceived discrepancies between the program itself and the district conditions seen as necessary for adoption.

With regard to program characteristics (Table 3) the data could be interpreted to mean that the respondents' major areas of concern were focused on staff acceptance of the roles of teachers and students, how the curriculum is organized and structured, multi-grade grouping of students, and cost. Most of these program features imply quite different ways of operation. Areas of less concern included administration, student evaluation, curricular/student management and program outcomes.

With regard to the five major discrepancy areas (Table 4) the least area for concern was that of possible discrepancies between resources required for the program and resources available in the district. Excluding the possibility of excess costs required for start up and operation, this area included the issues of materials, physical space, time, personnel, and administrative arrangements. The next area in order of less concern was the need for the program which assessed such issues as the scope of the program and multi-level grouping, type of effect, and the subject matter. The third area, adoption convenience, was made up of factors such as adoptability, diversibility, reorganization or training required, potential disruptions, and its accessibility.

Fourth in order, items assessing perceptions toward the philosophical slant of the program, dealt with the curriculum content organization in terms of its sequentialness and structure, theoretical basis, self-sufficiency, and type of evaluation. Finally, and registered as of most concern, was incentives for adoption. This area consisted of items asking about early/late knowledge of results, probability of outside funding, and importance of peer opinion.

The frequency percentages for each discrepancy area were computed by combining responses to several related program characteristics (see Figure 1, page 9). However, frequencies for each discrepancy area are not necessarily reflective of a particular program characteristic. For example, the discrepancy area of resources required was regarded by this sample as the least potential problem--but "cost of installation" (one of the characteristics associated with resources) was viewed by some as a potential problem.

F. Conclusions

The approach used in this study was judged to be potentially valuable as a means of assisting developers with issues related to product refinement, and dissemination efforts. For this sample, certain district variables such as urbanicity tended to be an important factor influencing a "decision" to adopt EBCE. However, other variables (history of adoptions, support for innovations, and the existing teaching/learning process) were also suggested as important. Perhaps the existence of a problem(s) in a district is an important ingredient for adoption to occur. Once this is recognized, other potential barriers may appear less troublesome, at least initially.

The discrepancy model was judged to be very useful as a springboard for item development and data organization. The results tend to suggest possible foci for further development work (e.g., explication of EBCE's theoretical

base, low-cost training and technical assistance, non-disruptive entry strategies for LEA implementation) and for further dissemination directions.

Further, district participants were intrigued with the potential of the instrument for identifying potential barriers to adoption within their districts where efforts might need to be applied. This aspect of the feasibility studies became increasingly important to participating districts as they began to seriously consider the feasibility of adopting EBCE, Thus, what was designed primarily as a simulation activity became a real occasion for adoption and implementation planning.

It is believed that following revision of the item set, it may become a useful tool to help EBCE staff to identify those districts who possess the greatest potential as implementation sites.

References

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Sikorski, L. and Hutchins, C. A Study of the Feasibility of Marketing Programming for Educational R&D Products. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, July 1974.

APPENDIX

Table 1

District Means by Program Characteristics

Range 0-3

Characteristics	District A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1. Program Scope	0.33	0.66	1.33	0.33	1.00	1.66	1.66	1.33
2. Content Scope	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.50	1.50	0.50	1.00	1.50
3. Content Org.	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
4. Teacher Function	0.66	0.66	0.66	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.33	2.00
5. Student Function	0.33	0.00	0.33	0.66	0.66	1.00	1.33	1.00
6. Teacher/learning Method	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.50	1.50
7. Student Grouping	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
8. Materials	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.66	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.33
9. Physical Setting	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
10. Student Evaluation	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.50	1.00	0.00
11. Use of Time	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.50	1.00
12. Intended Outcomes	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.50	0.50
13. Governance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
14. Cost	2.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
15. Conformity with Tradition	0.50	1.00	0.50	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.50	1.00
Total Mean by District	0.32	0.39	0.52	0.54	0.64	0.98	1.22	1.28

Table 2

District Means by Discrepancy Area

Range 0-3

Discrepancy Area	District A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Need	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.83	0.67	1.50	1.00	1.00
Incentives	0.50	1.00	0.50	0.50	1.00	0.50	0.50	2.00
Philosophies	0.40	0.29	0.57	0.71	1.14	0.85	1.43	1.14
Resources	0.40	0.20	0.00	0.40	0.20	0.80	1.60	1.20
Adoption Conversion	0.22	0.44	0.67	0.73	0.44	1.00	1.22	1.33
Total Mean by District	0.34	0.43	0.51	0.50	0.69	0.93	1.15	1.33

Table 3

Frequency Percentages Across Districts

by Program Characteristics

(rank ordered by recorded zero discrepancy)

Program Characteristics	0 (no discrepancy)	1 (minor discrepancy)	2 (moderate discrepancy)	3 (major discrepancy)
1. Governance	100%	-	-	-
2. Student Evaluation	75%	19%	6%	-
3. Physical Setting	63%	25%	13%	-
4. Materials	58%	33%	8%	-
5. Use of Time	56%	38%	6%	-
6. Intended Outcomes	50%	50%	-	-
7. Content Scope	44%	44%	13%	-
8. Student Function	38%	58%	4%	-
9. Teaching/learning Method	38%	50%	13%	-
10. Teacher Function	38%	21%	42%	-
11. Program Scope	25%	45%	29%	-
12. Cost of EBCE	25%	25%	50%	-
13. Conformity with Tradition	13%	81%	6%	-
14. Student Grouping	13%	63%	25%	-
15. Content Organization	-	88%	13%	-

Table 4

Frequency Percentages Across Districts

by Discrepancy Areas

(rank ordered by recorded zero discrepancy)

Discrepancy Area	0 (no discrepancy)	1 (minor discrepancy)	2 (moderate discrepancy)	3 (major discrepancy)
1. Resources Required	60%	23%	18%	-
2. Need for Program	46%	40%	15%	-
3. Adoption Convenience	42%	40%	18%	-
4. Philosophical Slant of EBCE	33%	58%	8%	-
5. Incentives for Adoption	31%	56%	8%	-

Table 5

The Relationship Between Districts with High and Low Discrepancy Scores and Their Present Commitment to Adoption

	Districts Rejecting EBCE	Districts still on Decision Process	Districts Adopting EBCE	Totals
High Discrepancy Scores	3	0	0	3
Low Discrepancy Scores	0	2	3	5
	3	2	3	8